UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.426
17 June 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Twenty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 426th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 8 June 1999 at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. GONZALEZ

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

COMMEMORATION OF THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

Any corrections to the record of this meeting and of other meetings will be issued in a corrigendum.

99-80663 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (CEDAW/C/1999/II/I)

1. The agenda was adopted.

REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON ON ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BETWEEN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

2. The CHAIRPERSON said that the pre-session working group had formulated lists of issues on the reports to be considered during the current session. Those lists had been compiled in a single document and circulated to the members of the Committee. Ms. Schopp-Schilling, who had chaired the working group, would subsequently discuss its work.

3. The Commission on the Status of Women and the Open-ended Working Group on the Elaboration of a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention had both met in early March. The Working Group had finalized the text of the draft Optional Protocol. That text had then been endorsed by the Commission, which had adopted a resolution recommending its submission by the Economic and Social Council to the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly for adoption.

4. As Chairperson of the Committee, she had had the honour of addressing the Commission at the opening of its general debate. She had drawn attention to the twentieth anniversary of the Convention, noting that, although 163 States had ratified it, the goal of universal ratification by the year 2000 was far from being realized, and had called upon those Member States that had not yet ratified the Convention to do so as soon as possible. She had also pointed out that, since almost all the States that had not ratified the Convention openly conducted a policy of discrimination against women and girl children, and in some cases even systematically violated their human rights, it was unlikely that universal ratification would be achieved. She had called on Member States to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which would establish the number of annual sessions which the Committee required in order to carry out its work and would enable it to fulfil its new responsibilities arising from the adoption of the Optional Protocol.

5. In describing the work carried out by the Committee since March 1998, she had drawn attention to its statement on reservations to the Convention, and pointed out that the Committee accorded serious attention to the reservations lodged against articles 2 and 16, which, in its view, seriously affected the status of women and their enjoyment of human rights. She had mentioned the formulation of general recommendation No. 24, on article 12, which was a significant contribution to the consideration of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

6. The Chairperson had also drawn attention to the Committee's report on the results achieved in implementing the Platform for Action, which had been submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly entitled: Women 2000:

gender equality, development and peace. The Commission had also taken up two of the critical areas of concern set out in the Platform for Action, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and women and health. With regard to women and health, the Commission had reviewed and discussed general recommendation No. 24.

7. The Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had addressed the Commission. Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland had reiterated the commitment of WHO to creating a different reality for women's health, pointing out that development strategies had shown that investments in women's health produced very good results. Dr. Nafis Sadik had provided very important information on preparations for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and had observed that the problem of adolescent health and the high incidence of pregnancy and abortions among adolescent girls had been neglected.

8. A panel of health experts had been formed, which had included the Executive Director of the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). On the basis of the panel's discussions, the Commission had adopted a set of conclusions on women's health, which constituted an important complement to the Beijing Platform for Action. Those conclusions, along with the Committee's general recommendation on women's health, would form the basis for the future action by Governments and civil society. The texts of the statements made in those discussions as well as the conclusions reached would be very useful in the Committee's consideration of the implementation of article 12.

9. She had had the occasion to speak with Dr. Sadik as well as with Ms. Carol Bellamy, the Executive Director of UNICEF, both of whom had expressed interest in strengthening their cooperation with the Committee. Ms. Bellamy had reiterated her intention to disseminate information about the Convention and the rights of girl children through her organization's regional offices. The Chairperson had discussed the Committee's statement on reservations to the Convention with the two Executive Directors, and urged them to encourage the countries concerned to review and withdraw their reservations.

10. The agenda of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights had included an item on the rights of women, the result of years of efforts on the part of the Committee. She had been invited to attend the corresponding meetings and participate in a workshop organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, but illness had prevented her from doing so. Ms. Schopp-Schilling, who had represented the Committee in her stead, would describe those activities and distribute a copy of her statement to the Commission.

11. The Chairperson had attended the eleventh meeting of the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies, held in Geneva in May and had also participated in a workshop on gender mainstreaming in the United Nations human rights system, which had been convened by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Division for the Advancement of Women, and UNIFEM. It was worth noting that four of the treaty bodies were currently chaired by women: the Human Rights

Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The goal of the workshop had been to focus greater attention on the human rights of women and gender mainstreaming in the work of all the treaty bodies. It had also sought to evaluate the progress achieved thus far, identify the obstacles met, formulate strategies and recommendations for future action, and develop ways of ensuring that human rights instruments were implemented in a manner that took into account the systemic and systematic nature of discrimination against women.

COMMEMORATION OF THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (continued)

12. Ms. TALLAWY (Egypt) speaking as a former Chairperson of the Committee, said that, since the earliest sessions of the Committee, an enormous amount of progress had been made in terms of the resources and support provided to it and the Committee's relationship with the Governments of States parties. In the early days, the Committee had met for one two-week session per year with limited resources and little staff, in contrast to the current schedule of two three-week sessions and the excellent support provided by the Division for the Advancement of Women. Governments had initially viewed its activities with hostility and suspicion; and its members had been seen as extremists bent on embarrassing the reporting States. However, after a long struggle by Committee members, Governments were beginning to respect the Committee, and the impact of the Convention at the country level could be seen in the progress made by States parties in each reporting period. Another welcome development was the participation of non-governmental organizations in preparation of reports, which had been unheard of when the Committee had begun its work.

13. As Minister of Social Affairs of Egypt, she was currently overseeing a programme of social reforms concerning legislation on the status of women and family law and was working with the Ministry of Justice regarding the possible withdrawal of Egypt's reservations to the Convention. The High Commissioner for Human Rights had focused on the right to development, which was appropriate at a time when more than a billion people in the world lived below the poverty line. The fact that most of them were women clearly linked that issue to the status of women. The time had come to give priority to economic and social rights, which had been disregarded in the past because of the stress placed on civil and political rights in the confrontational atmosphere of the cold war era. Accordingly, she called on the Committee to make recommendations to the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development in the area of economic and social rights.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.